Patronage of Artistic Creation: A new vertical to an existing Model

On the celebrated podcast “Art World: What If…?”, World renowned Art advisor and collector, Allan Schwartzman made a statement

“The Art Industry has become too focused on Works of Art instead of the Works of Artist”

A reminder to art collectors, of all shapes and sizes to rethink how they spend their money. A sombre reminder that it is indeed, the compelling nature of an artist. Their context, and cultural references, from which great works of art are born.

True to the overused diagram, ‘the work you see vs. the work you don’t see’. The premier being what’s showcased, and the latter as the fuel that drives it.

Allan was talking to Art Collectors, but the message reigns true for the various players who exist within the Art World. Namely, the galleries and dealers, who often give Artists their first glimpses of being exposed to the world of recognition, and by consequence, market exchange.

It’s also not just limited to the works of Artists, but also the work of Curators. Allan went on to discuss the need of institutions to give curators a licence to roam and think freely in their curatorial practices. Moving away from what fits within the gallery's context, to thinking about how one might curate from a place of cultural context. Because in the end, that’s what moves the dial; tangibly and intangibly.

The focus on Galleries and Dealers is a logical one. According to the British Art Market Federation, in 2022, aggregate sales of Art work in the UK totalled £11bn. 58% of said sales deriving from Dealers and Galleries. It would be a misstep to derive any inference other than people are willing to spend money on art. At galleries, to the tune of c.£6.6bn.

Galleries in the UK come in all shapes and sizes, but anecdotally and broadly speaking, a model exists.

Galleries dovetail their time between showcasing and selling the works of established Artists and emerging Artists. The premier provides the capital from which Galleries will find emerging artists, who they will then try and break.

An understood, capital-intensive but lower-risk strategy with established artists. But a less understood, less capital-intensive but higher-risk strategy with emerging artists. So far as established artists bring in capital, portions can be reinvested in emerging artists.

I’ve detailed the model (as I see it) here:

Galleries & Dealers
Find Artists
Established Artists
Contract = Exclusivity
Galleries fund the production of their shows with the galleries' curator
Exhibition
Works of Art Sell
Emerging Artists
Contract = Exclusivity
Galleries fund (less well) the production of shows with the galleries' curator
Exhibition
Works of Art sells
Works of Art don't sell
Gallery makes a loss

From the British Art Market Federation, almost 75% of galleries and dealers state that they patronise emerging artists. It's not necessarily a bad model. But one fraught with risk and through conversation, one that doesn't give emerging artists the best opportunity at becoming a success. Because if all else fails, there are many more, for which galleries can use this model to experiment with.

There's also a question about how these emerging artists get selected, and it comes down to **access**.

Alongside material resources (read as: capital), this might be the biggest barrier to entry for prospective artists to make a career out of their Art.

In the article, "How do Galleries find new Artists" by Scott Indrisek on art platform, artsy.net. Scott cites various ways in which Galleries find emerging artists. Some of which being:

- Organic Connections
- Art Education & MFA Programmes
- Studio Visits
- Purchasing Art
- Engagement with Galleries

To varying degrees, all of these ways are rooted in an access to both capital and equally, an existing network within the Art World. And therein lies a two-fold problem, when it comes to the creation of compelling art, and equally, the need to keep the market fresh, cosmopolitan and home to diverse thought with diverse cultural contexts.

1. How can a would-be artist be spotted if they're starting from a place of no network and no capital?
2. How can galleries continue to push the boundaries of what art is, curating shows and showcasing work that not only presents the 'gift' that is art but also improves their standing and reputation as galleries?

Let's consider the demographic landscape of those who work in the arts. With only 1 in 10 art workers being of working class heritage. More specifically, only 5% of workers of galleries

and museums are working class. And to top that all off, 90% of cultural workers are white. We begin to be able to build out a picture of the implications this brings in the ability to showcase ‘compelling’ art.

And thus, a model that needs to be rethought for reasons of **access** and **privilege** if not anything else.

To intentionally describe an Art Gallery as ‘Contemporary’, is to make the intention to support emerging artists. For it is, emerging artists who typify the word ‘contemporary’.

The goal of an Art Gallery is to hear, digest, understand and synthesise what society is saying through the medium of Art. If this is not achieved, what’s the difference between a Contemporary Art Gallery and a Permanent Collection at a Public Museum?

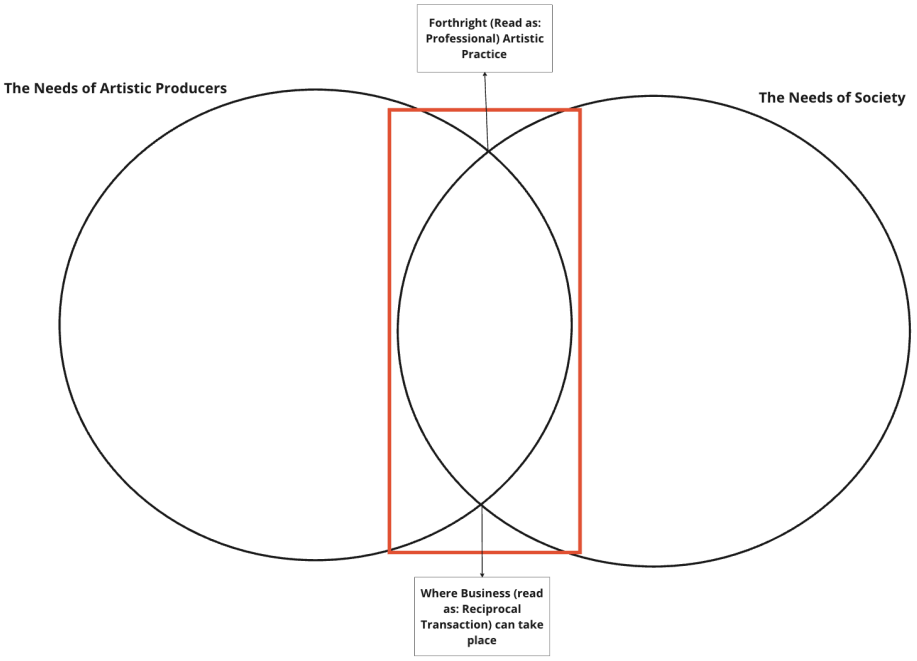
Galleries need to facilitate the heartbeat of a society. It’s the duty of Artists to reflect that in work and practice. And it’s for society as a whole to dictate the success of this.

There is a need to **reduce the barriers to access and capital.**

For Artists & Curators, this is their ability to have the material resource to create and survive in their respective locales.

For Citizens, this is their ability to engage with Art consciously in a way that makes sense for them.

My strong opinion (loosely held) is that the work of artists is in fact, the practice of artists. And a forthright artistic practice is one that sits at the intersection of the needs of said artist and the needs of society.


Forthright (Read as: Professional) Artistic Practice
The Needs of Artistic Producers
The Needs of Society
Where Business (read as: Reciprocal Transaction) can take place

Historically, this is how Art has been seen. An answer to the needs of society; to understand the world. And at the same time, provide the resource to Artists creating visual knowledge, from which they can live, experience and of course, create more knowledge for society to consume, challenge and connect with.

So it begs the question(s):

How might we imagine a world where the works of artists supersedes the work of art?

How might we design a world where artistic practice is championed through material support?

How might we design a world, where the Art industry in all forms mirrors the very fabric of our society?

The question is one of funding and support. Not necessarily thinking about novel new ways to fund, but looking inwards and reframing how we currently fund, with a look to redesigning it to make it more equitable.

If we accept that, there are a number of players involved in the showcasing and selling of Art within the market. We have to give reverence to the people who make it possible, firstly and foremostly; the artist and the curator.

If we're also to accept that Contemporary Art Galleries have a two-pronged goal of showcasing the works of Emerging Artists and reflecting what society is saying. What civic duty should Galleries provide in supporting Artistic creators?

For Art to exist as a gift. As a source of knowledge. And ultimately, a cultural enricher, that provides space to connect, think and critique we have to think about how we formally patronise the arts.

As the space facilitators, **how might galleries play a role in challenging the Art world in a way that doesn't create additional work?**

I propose repurposing existing funds to create a central fund for artists and curators. Galleries could allocate a nominal portion of their profits or receive tax offsets to support artistic practice. This approach would provide material resources for artists to develop their craft without immediate commercial pressures."

The goal of this could potentially yield a **number of outcomes:**

1. Galleries and Dealers taking a proactive approach to the civic duty to safeguard the next generation of artists and curators
2. Artists and Curators developing a sense of gratitude and becoming more forthright in their practice

I want to expand on the second point, and revisit some previous points I've made about art being a gift. Something that compels people and ultimately, something that people will pay money for.

Let's imagine a world where a would-be or an emerging artist was funded for 2-3 years, with the material resources to practise and create.

How might said artists become more forthright in their practice?

How might said artists recognise their duty to pay it forward in terms of how they share their artistic practice?

How might said artists situate themselves between their own needs and the needs of society to deliver work that impacts the lives of society at large?

Immediately, a world of possibilities open that include the Art Market, but also stretch beyond it. It raises questions of purpose and how one might be free to explore that without the constraints.

These ideas have been realised but usually in an isolated manner. We can cite numerous examples of artists, as well as art and cultural workers leading the way in patronising the careers of upcoming artists.

Think of Titus Kaphar and his role in establishing NXTHVN in New Connecticut. His motivation? Realising that he could not live as an artist if he wasn't able to earn money. And subsequently, realising it would be the same for his peers who grew up in similar circumstances to him.

The same could be said of Yinka Shonibare and his patronage of early career Artists through Guest Projects, which formerly ran out of a carpet factory in East London up until COVID. More recently, we're seeing an innovative approach to curation, from the New Curators fellowship program. And of course, the long time and consistent work undertaken by Bow Arts and Hypha Studios.

Whilst different in nature, all these concepts are naturally limited by the scope of focus and also capital. What I'm proposing is something that encapsulates all of this, but seeks to provoke thought on how we might achieve something on an **institutional level**.

Think about what the world would be like if this was achieved? For artists, for curators, for galleries, but also for citizens of all kinds, many of whom may or may not find art accessible as a medium to consume or even practise themselves.

A world where galleries and dealers might proactively patronise emerging artists, without having to fit them into the context of a commercial and cultural landscape, which neither favours the gallery, artist or curator.

A world where artists and curators might hone a compelling practice from which galleries find it easier to showcase their work.

A world where Artists and Curators, through a sense of duty and gratitude, become forthright in their practice. And devise new ways for their work to reach not just the art world, but the world at large.

A world, where a person living in Darlington (where less than 1% of the local population work in the national creative economy) might see art as a medium to bring their lived experience to life.

A world where the intangible value of art may reign supreme.